

# Tech 21 Trademark 10 Modelling Combo

**THOUGHT ALL MODELLING AMPS WERE DIGITAL?** Think again, Batman. Tech 21 have been putting big amp sounds in small solid state packages for years, as this petite new tone machine will testify. Review by Paul Cuddeford

**TRADEMARK 10 RRP: £269**

Anyone who remembers the first wave of SansAmp products in the early '90s will recall that the impact on the marketplace was similar to that of the Line 6 POD last year: the new technology had barely set its stall out and suddenly every studio seemed to have one. In Tech 21's case it began with various pedals for stage use and recording direct, then followed a 60W two-channel combo incorporating the analogue modelling techniques employed in the pedals.

This new Trademark 10 is the little brother of the 60W combo. According to the enclosed blurb, it's based upon the critically acclaimed SansAmp GT2 pedal. The Trademark 10 is in fact tiny and probably best compared to a Fender Pro Junior (styled somewhat after a '50s tweed Champ) as far as the dimensions



Cab full of hollow: not much round back... but magic



go. The controls are mounted on the top in the same fashion as the small Fender and the weight is a mere 6.5kg (14.25lbs). The internal speaker is a special design 8" unit rated at 15 watts, and a speaker output is also included for those who require the various sonic attributes of different cabinets. Power output is rated at 10 thumping watts and the optimal impedance loading is at 8Ω.

The cabinet is resplendent in a fine-grained black vinyl with no corner protection, perhaps considered unnecessary due to the amplifier's size and intended use. The handle is much in line with current trends, using a retro-stitched construction and shiny chrome mounting plates: it wouldn't look out of place on a handbuilt boutique amplifier costing 10 times the price. This combo is almost completely open backed but at least there are no valves to worry about knocking. An Accutronics three-spring

reverb tank sits snugly in the cab and is connected by hi-fi like phono plugs. Overall, the presentation is rugged and looks functional yet funky. The brushed steel effect on the fascia gives the unit a pro studio vibe: the labelling is clear and unfussy unlike some other modelling amplifiers (though having less to model makes this easier).

First up in the control alignment, from the left of the panel, is the input socket – not your cheapo jobbie but an all-metal example. But the nitty gritty of the Trademark 10 starts with the adjacent Character section: this analogue emulating circuitry is derived from the SansAmp pedals and divides itself into three categories: Amp, Mod and Speaker. The amp options are Calif, British and Tweed: Calif is compared to a Mesa/Boogie, British is Marshall and Tweed seeks inspiration from Fender.

'Each of the three positions affects

## CHECK OUT...

Direct comparisons are scarce as modelling combos tend to be larger than the Trademark 10, so here are a variety of options to consider in the compact/versatile/recording convenience arena:

**LINE SIX**'s Spider (£425) is a 50W 1x12" digital combo with six amp models and six effects, and there's the immensely successful POD desktop modelling processor for £299 (and see POD Pro review elsewhere this issue), **contact** ☎ 01788-821600, **JOHNSON**

offer the JT50 modelling combo – another 1x12" 50-watter – with 12 amps and nine effects for £549; their processor unit is the J-Station (£299), **contact** Arbiter ☎ 020-8202-1122.

A nice low-power all-valver could be a less versatile but toneful recording option. Look no further than **CORNFORD**'s Harlequin: 6W, 1x12", class A and £499, **contact** ☎ 01277-280000. On the same note an **ORANGE** AD5 may appeal: 5W, hand-wired, class A through an alnico 10", all for £420, **contact** Omece ☎ 020-7240-8292.

multiple dimensions of the individual personality traits inherent to each amplifier type,' the blurb tells us. 'This switch is not merely a simple EQ change, nor does it just affect the gain structure. Each amplifier type has its own tonality and its own input sensitivity. Each reacts differently to the dynamics of your playing style and to the signal level of the instrument.' Big talk indeed, especially if you've ever taken a SansAmp product apart and found very little connected to those persuasively named dip switches. It's a bit like lifting the huge bulging bonnet of a Vauxhall 'Saturday Night' Nova and finding a disappointing 1200cc engine underneath – but it's what it sounds like and how long it lasts that really count.

The Mod category relates to gain structure, from Clean through Hi Gain to Hot. Last but not least is the speaker department: Flat is what it says, UK (here we go) seeks to emulate the sound of a Celestion 'Greenback' and US reckons it does a good Electrovoice impression. A Drive control adjusts the overall gain. The master section includes an active EQ of Low, Mid and High and a Reverb and Level (master volume) controls conclude the facilities. It must be mentioned that the pots have a smooth, quality feel and are topped of with some rather original-looking black chickenhead knobs.

The rear panel most notably includes an XLR direct out (operating at -20dB) with a ground lift switch. There's also an FX loop and a useful headphone out that mutes the internal speaker.

## ● SOUNDS

I tested the Trademark 10 with a Strat, a Les Paul, a Telecaster and an ES-335. With single coil guitars married to a Clean/Flat character setting the sound is rather thin and sterile, even for a combo of this size.

With the Mod switch utilising the slightly higher gain, however, the tone improves dramatically. There's also a very organic 'edge of distortion' within the sound as you ease up the Drive (so to speak). In fact those crunchy boutique amp tones that are so hard to emulate are better served

here than on a certain red, kidney bean-shaped desktop unit.

Switching between the different speaker characteristics produces dramatic changes in tone. The UK setting seems to boost hard, higher mids and keep the low end tight, making it good for rock rhythm and creamy Les Paul lead – but it's not as pleasing for the cleaner settings, sounding a bit harsh. The US speaker setting immediately sums up a pair of JBLs on overload with a loose low end and bell-like



The Trademark 10's control rig – including 'Character' section – is straightforward, but extremely versatile

highs. Fun!

Obviously these are my own personal impressions; purchasers of this little beauty will have hours of fun finding out what their likes and dislikes are. Overall, the emulations are very convincing and usable, right from sparkly clean – via cranked '50s Fender and boutique models – through to full-blown rectified sonic laxative. Even an 8" driver can sound huge with a few watts behind it and a mike in the right place. If that doesn't provide enough lows and presence then that glorious XLR out does the trick. The combination of the XLR and a mike in front of the speaker is optimum for a big, warm tone – but phase cancellation will detract from this combination if the mike is

in the wrong place (experiment for a few minutes and you'll get it right).

The actual tone controls (Low, Mid and High) are rather unlike normal amp pots, functioning more like a recording console's EQ. This is due to their interaction with each other and the severity of effect they have on the signal – very much a plus point when considering this unit for recording duties. Unlike some digital modelling amplifiers, this analogue approach clearly benefits from having the volume wound up, particularly in the

crunchy rhythm sounds as they gain a little compression near full volume.

The reverb deserves a special mention: it's excellent – rich, long and, at first listen, quite a shock coming from such a small combo. With severe amounts of reverb and overdrive the decay doesn't shriek and sound as harsh as some other manufacturers' efforts. Also, the reverb tank's mounting seems to provide a certain stability as it's quite hard to get it to 'clank' and 'sproing' in comparison to, say, your average Fender. The headphone socket provides ample signal and can be used as a speaker mute or a DI out. According to the blurb it has a slight high end boost to compensate for typical headphone EQ response.

## VERDICT

Brilliant – well worth the dosh and infinitely useful to home recordists and pros alike. Unlike many digital modellers, tonally the Trademark 10 brings something of its own to the party. It has to be one of the

most luxurious, versatile and diminutive practice amps ever (and it looks great sat next to an Apple iMac). This is a very convenient way to record quality guitar sounds at home quietly and cheaply – and not come out sounding like every other POD owner. Check one out; you shouldn't be disappointed. **G**

## FACTFILE

### TECH 21 TRADEMARK 10 RRP: £269

USA built 10W solid state modelling combo with 1x8" special design loudspeaker, Accutronics spring reverb, XLR balanced out, headphone out, FX loop, 8Ω speaker output and tube amplifier emulation technology.

**Controls:** Drive, Amp, Mod, Speaker, Low, Mid, High, Reverb, Level, power switch.

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